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The Myth of a Dual-earner Society

-New Policy Discourses in European Welfare States¹

Trine P. Larsen, Peter Taylor-Gooby & Johannes Kananen

Abstract:

Mobilising the female workforce has been a political goal since the early 1990's across Europe. National governments have promoted a range of policies intended to enhance the female employment rate under the broad headings of "reconciliation of work and family life" and "equal opportunities". This paper reviews the recent welfare reforms intended to enhance women's participation in paid work and considers how they are likely to be successful in promoting genuine equality in terms of policy outcome. After giving a brief overview of the female workforce and the national characteristic of welfare settlements in Spain, Germany, Sweden and the UK, the recent welfare reforms are assessed with respect to whether a change of national policy discourse towards a dual-earner society is present in the four countries. The paper concludes that in recent reforms a discourse, which relegates women to live a role of secondary rather than equal worker has tended to predominate, mainly, because emphasis has been on work-life balance policies, intended to enhance the female employment rate in order to promote economic growth. Policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market and informal sector in order to advance social justice have received much less attention. As a result, the underlying ideals and perceptions of gender relations within recent reforms have not been transformed and governments fail to create incentives for an equal sharing of the carer and provider role. Despite the failures of promoting a dual-earner discourse, current perceptions of women in society are transforming and may imply gradual convergence across Europe.

1 Introduction

Mobilising the female workforce was seen by national governments and the EU as the way to combat the challenges of economic recession, rising unemployment rates, demographic changes and escalating social expenditure costs that occurred during the early 1990's. Women were seen as a hidden workforce that could take up newly created jobs and help release the pressure on the welfare states (Rees, 1998, p.178). Indeed, new policies were needed to pursue such a policy goal, since much welfare, gender contracts and labour market policy was based on the male breadwinner model (Rees, 1998, p.179). This paper reviews the recent welfare reforms intended to enhance women's participation in paid work and considers how far they are likely to be successful in promoting genuine equality in terms of policy outcome. It concludes that in recent reforms a discourse that relegates women to live a role of secondary rather than equal worker has tended to predominate. An important reason for this is that national governments have mainly emphasised the political agenda regarding policies on work-life balance issues, aiming at mobilising the female workforce. The political agenda that includes policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities for men

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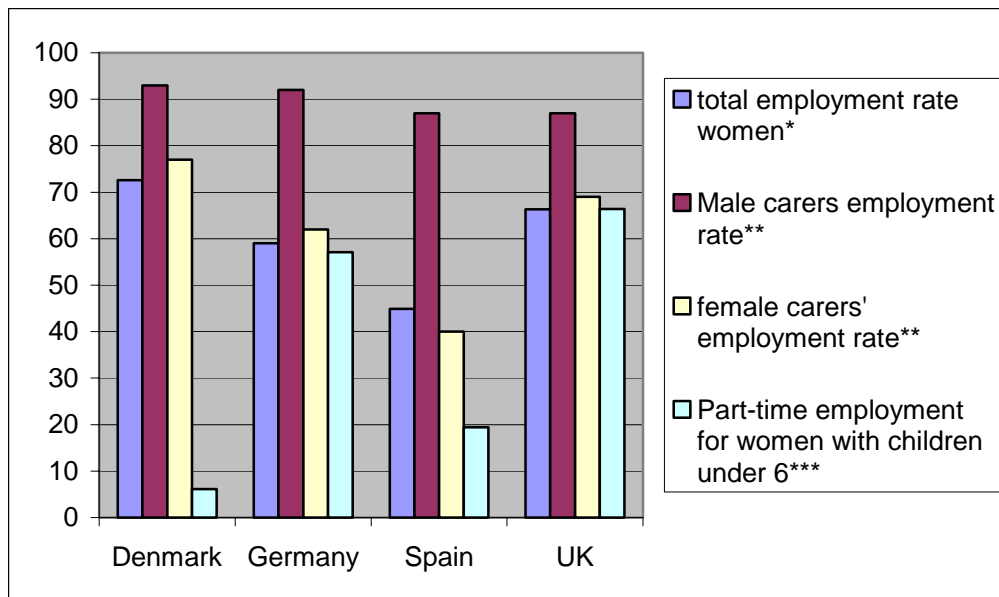
and women in the labour market as well as in the informal care sector have received much less attention. By neglecting the political agenda of equal opportunities, national governments fail to legitimise their dual-earner discourse, as they have not managed to change the underlying ideals and perceptions of gender relations within their own policies and society and thereby failed to create incentives for an equal sharing of the provider and carer role. As a result, national policies continue to support a working pattern in which women are secondary workers rather than promote a dual-earner society, which is a prerequisite for a successful mobilisation of the female workforce.

In the following, we first present a brief overview of the female workforce and the main characteristics of the welfare settlements across Europe. We then discuss contemporary theories regarding discourse theory before moving on to examine the most recent reforms within Spain, Germany, Sweden and the UK, as they represent four distinct European welfare settlements with different breadwinner models (Orloff, 2002, p.13-14).

2 The Female Workforce and the National Characteristic of Welfare Settlements in Spain, Germany, Sweden and the UK

Women's labour market participation has risen remarkably in the EU over the last decades (see table 1). 56 per cent were in paid work in 2002, representing an average increase of more than 10 percentage point in the EU since 1970. However, the rising employment rates are merely a reflection of quantity rather than quality, as most women work in low status jobs, often on a part-time basis, and earn on average 16 percentage points less than men's average gross hourly earnings (Eurostat, 12/11-2003, see table 2). In addition, the main responsibility of domiciliary care continues to fall on women, although their working patterns have changed and recent attitude data indicate a desire for a more equal division of childcare and household chores among European citizens (European Value Study, 1999, p. 121, 139). Women are twice as likely as men to be involved in informal childcare and it is primarily women who reduce their workload or even leave the labour market during periods of childrearing (see table 1). The impact of children on women's participation in paid work varies considerably across Europe while men's employment rate is hardly affected by childcare responsibilities (see figure 1 and table 1).

Figure 1: Gender and Labour Market Participation for women and Men, participation of those aged 15-64 as per cent of relevant population



Sources: * OECD Labour Force Statistics 1970-1990, OECD Paris **Eurostat (2002a) Tables A.20, A21; ECHP 1998 data, ***Calculated from OECD (2003)c, 2002, SS4.

Note: carers are defined as individuals aged 20-49 looking after children under 15.

Mothers in the Nordic countries and France mainly work full-time, while in Britain and most continental countries they tend to be in part-time employment and in Southern Europe a large group of mothers remain outside the labour market. The different levels of national care services and entitlements may be an important reason for this variation in mothers' employment rates, although national governments have to a varying degree tried to adjust and support the new family patterns emerging across Europe by promoting extensive "women-friendly" policy programmes (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 50ff).

The national attempts represent a move away from the traditional male-breadwinner/female housewife model, where access to national insurance, public benefits, health service and pensions were originally based on the assumption of men's wages equalling a family wage, leaving women's welfare and implicitly their civil rights to be mediated by their relationship with men (Orloff, 2002, p. 11). Within European countries, the transformation process towards a dual-earner society has important differences due to national traditions, including variations in the role of the state, cultural and political frameworks (Elingsæter, 2000, p. 61). When comparing dual-earner policies across Europe, Esping-Andersen (1999) divides European welfare states into three regime types; the liberal, conservative and social democratic, and potentially a fourth welfare regime representing Southern Europe, as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece are considerably more family centred than Continental Europe with respect to public provision of care services and strong kinships (Esping Andersen, 1999, p.90-94). The Continental and Southern regime models are, therefore, categorised as more "familiaristic" regimes while the liberal and the Scandinavian regime types are classified as 'de-familiaristic' regimes, because dependence on kinship for caring and household tasks are eased either by state or market provisions (Esping Andersen, 1999, p. 51). This regime division has been criticised as gender blind, neglecting informal work done by women, as the concept of citizenship is based on access to paid work, which predominantly relates to men (Wehner & Abrahamson, 2003, p.4). Several attempts have tried to incorporate the

gender dimension into Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typologies while other scholars have developed alternative models, using gender as the focal point (Ellingsæter, 1998, p. 61).

By combining Esping-Andersen's four welfare regimes with the empirical data mentioned earlier, it becomes evident that four distinctive welfare regimes with a different constellation of the breadwinner model occur with respect to Germany, Spain, Britain and Sweden. The German corporatist model relies on the reciprocity of the male breadwinner and female carer and have only limited care services, but high levels of social transfers to mothers leaving the labour market during periods of childrearing; the Spanish welfare state centres around the services provided by the family due to strong kinship ties and a weak welfare states; the British market-orientated model relies on a non-interventionist family policy with targeted assistance towards poor families and children at risk, leaving it to the market and informal sector to provide care services; while the Swedish welfare state with its heavily child-orientated policies and emphasis on gender equality represent to a large extent a dual-earner society (Ghysels, 2003, p. 2; Perrons, 1995, p.103-105).

The national family policies may be an important reason why to varying degrees families in Britain, Spain, Germany and Sweden continue to employ a traditional pattern of dividing work and caring tasks during periods of childrearing. Indeed, fathers' take up rate of parental leave is relatively lower than their female counterpart in all four countries. Thus, 42 per cent of Swedish fathers use their rights to parental leave while the take up rate is much lower in Britain (24 per cent) and less than 1.5 per cent in Germany (Riksförsäkringsverket, 2003; Eironline, 1998, DTI & DFEE, 2000, p. 21). The main reasons put forward by many parents for adopting traditional gender roles range from lack of economic incentives, minimal statutory rights for paternity leave, fathers' concerns about job security, negative attitudes in the workplace towards leave, lack of affordable childcare to individual perceptions (Sundstrom & Duvander, 1999, p. 18-22, LO 8/02-2001, DTI & DFEE, 2000, p. 22, Bothfeld, 2003, Leira, 2002, p.92). Before examining whether policy-makers in Sweden, Germany, Spain and the UK have addressed these issues in their recent reforms and thereby designed policies, which support a dual-earner society, the following section presents a theoretical framework for assessment.

3 Changing National Policy Discourses

Discourse theory offers an alternative way of analysing policy-making processes compared with institutionalism and rational choice approaches. By contrast to the latter approaches, which tend to focus on the impact of institutions, interests and power-games, discourse theory concentrates on 'the role of meaningful social practices and ideas in political life' (Howarth, 1995, p. 115). Instead of giving a rather static picture of the policy-making process, discourse analysis incorporates a more dynamic perspective, as it is capable of explaining radical changes within national policy-making (Schmidt, 2002, p. 209). Based on the assumption that cognitive and normative aspects play an essential role in policy-makers understanding of the world, discourse analysis is able to explain the emergence of policy change, since such social constructions can change over time, partly through interaction with other people, and partly through a process of social learning (Surel, 2002, p. 1).

A policy discourse is defined as *'what people say to one another and to the public in their efforts to generate and legitimise a policy programme'* (Schmidt, 2002, p. 210). It is the underlying policy discourse or paradigm that determines the policy outcomes, as it frames the national policy discussion by representing the sum of key actors' values and ideas with regard to the key problems, policy concepts and norms, the methods and policy instruments used along with the objectives and ideals underlying the specific policy programme (Schmidt, 2002, p. 213-214, Surel, 2002, p.3; Hall, 1993 p. 279).

National policy-making can be seen as a process of social learning, which is influenced by the involved actors' interests, their ideas, perceptions, and the institutional framework including past decisions and the rules of the political game (Hall, 1993, p. 275; Surel, 2002, p. 1). Introducing new policy programmes aimed at fully mobilising the female workforce proves extremely difficult, as national policy-making mainly relies on past decisions and policy procedures rather than changes in social and economic conditions (Hall, 1993, p. 277). Therefore, the success of mobilising the female workforce depends on national governments' ability to both convince key actors about the need for intervention and the efficiency of the proposed policies as well as to satisfy them and the general public that the proposed policies respond to real problems in ways that are in correspondence with national values (Schmidt, 2002, p. 221). With respect to national values these are here defined as policy-makers and the general public's perceptions regarding the division of the provider and caring role.

The task of the policy discourse is to promote cognitive and normative arguments, which justify and legitimate the government's policy programme (Schmidt, 2002, p. 221). A policy discourse has therefore a cognitive and normative function, which can be seen as two separate political agendas. The former justifies the policy programme by highlighting the key problems and providing efficient solutions to current and potential future problems and defines the methods and policy instruments used. The normative function sets the political goals and ideals and serves to legitimise the policy programme by demonstrating its appropriateness in terms of following or transforming pre-existing national values (Schmidt, 2002, p.213-221). Applying Vivien Schmidt's logic to national policies aimed at mobilising the female workforce, two political agendas appear, each representing cognitive and more normative founded aspects. The first agenda consists of more cognitive orientated policies, enabling women, particularly mothers to reconcile work and family life and thereby intended to enhance women's participation into paid work in order to improve national productivity, growth and competitiveness. The second agenda relates to equal opportunities policies that encourage both women and men to a more equal sharing of the provider and caring role in order to advance social justice. It exemplifies attempts to transform policy-makers' and the general public's ideological perceptions from the male breadwinner/female housewife model towards a dual-earner society where both men and women are seen as equal workers and carers.

The extent to which a change of national policy discourse towards a dual-earner society is present within recent national reforms depends on policy-makers' ability to implement the two political agendas. In relation to this, commentators draw attention to three types of changes in policy discourses; a first order change, which renews the existing policy programme by modifying the policy instruments in use; a second order

change that recasts the policy programme by altering the policy instruments and policy objectives: a third order change which represents a radical approach by changing the policy instruments, objectives and the underlying ideology (Schmidt, 2002, 222-223; Hall, 1993, p. 278, see table 3). It is only if a transformation of the pre-existing national values (the underlying ideals) takes place that a radical change of the policy discourse, e.g. a dual-earner discourse, will occur, as the policy programme otherwise will continue to reinforce the existing discourse, which in this case is the male breadwinner model (Schmidt, 2002, p. 221). Such a transformation is evident if policy-makers' perceptions have changed from following the male breadwinner model to support a dual-earner model and the new policies incorporate measures to promote a more equal sharing of the provider and carer roles. If policy makers' perceptions have not been transformed and the policies do not address gender equality, the reforms only have the characteristic of a first and second order degree change (see table 3), as they will continue to reinforce the traditional male breadwinner discourse rather than support the emergence of a dual-earner society.

In the following sections we first briefly review national governments' justification of the reforms and their overarching political goal. We then analyse the policies including the political activities in Spain, Sweden, Germany and the UK with respect to the two political agendas: 'reconciliation of work and family life' - and 'equal opportunities issues'.

4 Recent national policy reforms

During the late 1980's and early 1990's European states faced similar challenges in terms of economic recessions, rising unemployment rates, demographic changes and escalating social expenditure costs. The most important issues concerned the cost of pensions, health and social services for older people, the costs of high levels of unemployment and changes in family patterns (Pierson, 2001, p. 99). Mobilising the female workforce was seen by national governments and the EU as a way to respond to these new challenges, as women represented a hidden workforce, which could take up newly created jobs and help release the current pressure on the welfare states due to the low female employment rate (COM94(333final), section V; COM(93)551; Rees, 1998, p.178). Driven by economic concerns national governments agreed to set a common target for the female employment rate at the 2000 Lisbon Summit (Presidency Conclusions, 2000). By 2010 the political goal is that 60 per cent of women should be in employment. This called for a new construction of national gender contracts; labour market and welfare policy, as much current policy was based on the male breadwinner/female carer model. As a result, few countries had the services in place for promoting a dual-earner society (Rees, 1998, p. 179). The wide range of recent reforms aimed at mobilising the female workforce in Spain, Sweden, Germany and the UK may represent attempts of such a transformation.

4.1 Agenda One -Work-life balance reforms in Spain, Sweden, Germany and the UK²

The work-life balance reforms in Spain, Sweden, Germany and the UK comprise of various policies under the broad headings of parental leave, flexible working, social transfers for families with caring responsibilities for children and improvements of national childcare facilities. The more specific national initiatives are examined below with respect to whether they represent a change of policy discourse.

4.1.1 Parental leave and flexible working

Parental leave for both mothers and fathers, rights to take time off from work in emergency situations to care for a sick child and a request to work part-time have been implemented in all four countries, as a result of EU's directives on parental leave (1996), maternity leave (1992) and part-time work (1998). Recent national reforms have improved the length and parents' entitlement to parental leave, partly as a response to EU's requirements, and partly because of national initiatives to improve the incentives for women to take up paid work (Interview TUC, Eironline 1998, Sveriges Riksdag, 1999/2000). The most radical reforms have been in the UK and Spain where flexible working and new rights for both parents have been introduced while the reforms in Sweden and Germany have been of a more moderate character, as extensive parental leave systems were already in place in these two countries (see table 4). Despite the recent national improvements, parents' entitlements continue to vary across Europe. The Swedish government have in line with the Scandinavian model relied on a more universal founded approach, making the Swedish parental leave system one of the most generous systems in terms of paid leave and fathers' rights to leave. Although fathers' rights have improved in Germany with respect to parental leave, the new reforms continue to follow the traditions of a conservative regime, as paternity leave remains a non-statutory right and the financial incentives for fathers' to use their rights remain poor. The Spanish and British reforms can be regarded as only modest improvements and reflect both the liberal and more Southern European approach, partly because fathers' rights to leave are limited, and partly because parental leave is unpaid.

Despite the national differences, recent national reforms show an increasing emphasis on fathers' rights, which is a relatively new phenomenon in all four countries. Indeed, the new policy instruments indicate a change of national discourse towards a dual-earner society, as focus has moved from purely mothers' rights to maternity and parental leave to include similar rights for fathers'. However, the recent parental leave policies continue to be aimed mainly at women. Paternity leave is either non-existent or limited to a minimum of two days to a maximum of two months, which is in stark contrast to the much longer maternity leave rights. Moreover, parental leave is often unpaid or poorly funded in the four countries, whereby the financial incentive for families to employ a more equal sharing of the provider and carer role during periods of childrearing is reduced, as men's earnings often are much higher than their female counterpart (Siim, 1992, p. 33). National governments' failure to address the issue of equal rights and improve the economic incentives implies that recent policies continue

² This section draws heavily on the work of the German team (Frank Boenker, Andreas Aust & Hellmut Wollman), Swedish/Finnish Team (Virpi Timonen & Olli Kangas), the Spanish team (Ana Arriba & Louis Moreno) and the British Team (Trine P. Larsen, Peter Taylor-Gooby & Anne Daguerre) in carrying out interviews and preparing policy reviews.

to follow the logic of a male breadwinner/female carer ideology rather than a dual-earner model despite the acknowledgement of fathers' rights. This traditional way of thinking also dominates the national debates behind the reforms.

The political debate in Sweden shows a change of attitudes towards a dual-earner society. In the early 1970's only few feminists within the Social democratic party advocated for restricting periods of the parental leave scheme to fathers while this position is now widely accepted by most political actors (Leira, 1992, Timonen, 2003). However, the latest debates centred around the low take up rate of 'daddy leave' imply that this remains highly controversial. The proposal launched by the Social Democratic Minister of Equality, Margareta Winberg, to divide parental leave equally between men and women was rejected by most political parties, particularly the Christian Democrats, the employers associations, trade unions and even the general public, as it interferes with families' rights to decide how to organise their caring tasks (Jönsson, 2002, p.4; Interview; Social Democrats). The Liberals' (Folkpartiet's) idea of introducing a bonus to families sharing the parental leave equally was rejected on similar grounds (Jönsson, 2002, p.4). Despite the disputes over how to increase fathers' take up rate, national key actors acknowledge the need to design policies that encourage more fathers to take an active caring role in order to mobilise the female workforce. The latest proposal by the trade unions (TCO) is an example of this. They proposed to increase the thresholds for leave payments, as the current system reinforces traditional gender roles due to the lack of financial incentives for fathers to take leave (Interview; TCO). As part of its 2002 election campaign, the social democratic government promised to increase the income ceilings for similar reasons, but employers (Svensk Näringsliv) may renege on this promise, as it also means rising thresholds for the sickness benefit (Timonen, 2003). Indeed, a change of attitudes towards a dual-earner society is seen in the political debates, although the attitudes of employers lag behind. Recent research indicates that not all employers accept that their male workers should use their rights to parental leave (Sundstrom & Duvander, 1999, p. 18-22). It indicates that the Swedish government have to some degree managed to transform the perceptions of key actors towards a dual-earner model. However, economic constraints, particularly employers' reluctance to cover any extra costs seems to be the main barrier for achieving the goal of a dual-earner society.

In the UK, reluctance from employers was also the main reason why the length of paid maternity leave was only extended to cover the first 26 weeks, paid paternity leave limited to two weeks, parental leave remained unpaid and flexible working hours only became a right on request. However, campaign organisations such as EOC, the Maternity Alliance, and trade unions represented by the TUC along with the New Labour government and the Liberal Democrats were in favour of more generous rights (Interviews with DTI, TUC, EOC, Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation (2/12-1999). Employers' unwillingness to support more extensive rights to particularly fathers is not only due to rising costs and 'red tape', but also a matter of attitude. As a respondent expresses:

'The employers were not so opposed to extending the maternity leave than they were on improving parental leave. It is partly because some employers could not conceive that fathers might actually want to stay at home and look after their

children.[..]It (paternity leave) was much more opposed by employers than anything else' (Interview; EOC).

This traditional way of thinking shows that not all key actors' perceptions regarding the male breadwinner model have been transformed despite a change of attitudes is becoming apparent within the British debates. The views of the Conservatives seem also to reflect this, as their fundamental belief is that childcare is a private matter. However, they also argued that any extensions of parental leave will create a 'red tape burden' for small business and thereby prevent economic growth (Guardian 17-9-2000, Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation (2/12-1999)). The political structure of Whitehall accounts for New Labours ability to ignore parliamentary opposition. However, the majoritarian system was not able to withstand the veto-points put forward by the employers, questioning the strengths of the British political system.

Similarly, the Germany government could not ignore the opposition of employers. Followed by intense debates in which trade unions and the women's movement supported the government's proposal for a right to part-time work, the government had to give concessions to the employers in other policy areas (discussed later on under section of gender equality issues), to gain support from the employers to implement the parental leave reforms (Bönker, Aust and Hellman, 2003, p. 43). Indeed, the support by employers seems crucial in the German debates, but convincing the opposition, particularly the Christian Democrats (CDU), is also important due to the structure of the political system. The current red-green coalition government does not have the majority in the second chamber and therefore relies on the support from the CDU to implement political reforms. The red green-coalition managed to gain support from the CDU to implement their parental leave reforms, which only introduced minor changes to the existing system introduced by the Kohl government in 1986, which was designed to reinforce the male breadwinner model rather than support a dual-earner society (Interview; CDU). However, since then, a slow reorientation process has started within the CDU, where the party's views are changing from supporting the traditional gender pattern in which mothers are carers and housewives to a view that is more in line with the position of the red-green coalition. The red-green coalition sees parental leave as a right for both sexes and deems financial incentives important for mobilising the female workforce (Interview; CDU, SPD). Despite the recent changes, both parties continue to some extent to reinforce the traditional gender pattern, as paternity leave remains a non-statutory right and the policies continue to favour mothers as carers rather than parents sharing care due to the low levels of wage compensation for parents on parental leave. An important reason for this is the weak representation of women's interests in parliament and trade unions, leaving it mainly to women's organisations such as Deutsche Frauenrat to advocate for both parents rights (Interviews with CDU, SPD and Ministry of Family, Older People, Women and Youth).

Similarly, the employers association (CEOE) also played an important role in the political debates in Spain. Trade unions (CC.OO and UGT) proposed an extension of paid leave for family reasons including a four-week paternity leave scheme following the same conditions as for the maternity leave, but the employers association (CEOE) rejected these proposals. They stated that such measures would affect the prerogative of employers' rights; and might result in discrimination of female employees.

Following the line approved by employers, the government and later political parties adopted the new parental leave entitlements in 1999 (eiroline, 2003). Despite employers' opposition, a change of attitudes can be seen among the key actors. The political parties particularly the Socialist Party (PSOE) have recently acknowledged along with the trade unions the need for extending father's rights. The Socialists has three times proposed laws on paternity leave rights in Parliament, but their proposals have each time been rejected by the current PP government due to their majority in Parliament (Salido, 2002, p.30, Interview; El Pais). Indeed, this shows that many political actors continue to follow the logic of a one-earner society. The weak representation of women at the boards of political parties and trade unions accounts for the low profile of parental leave policies (eironline, 2003; International reform monitor, 2003).

Overall the analysis of recent parental leave reforms signify both a first and second order change, as new policy instruments have been introduced and the political goal has been to mobilise the female workforce. However, national governments have to varying degrees failed to transform the underlying ideals of the male breadwinner model. Thus, a greater awareness of men's rights and the need for promoting financial incentives is present. As a result, the national reforms cannot be classified as a third order degree change and thereby a new dual-earner discourse. In addition, the analysis indicates that the reluctance from employers to enhance the economic incentives and fathers' rights to leave have been determining factors for the policy outcomes while national governments to varying degree have been able to ignore parliamentary opposition due to the structure of the national political systems.

4.1.2 Social Transfers

Social transfer is another key tool used to help families reconcile work and caring responsibilities. It comprises of various tax exemptions and benefits that enables parents to reconcile work and family life. Recent reforms in the UK, Sweden, Spain and Germany have been particularly aimed at the less well-off families, mainly using targeted support based on means-testing rather than universal benefits (see table 5). However, there are important differences in the ways national governments have addressed the help aimed at mobilising the female workforce. The new reforms in Sweden and Germany have followed the traditions of the Nordic and conservative regimes as their policies mostly adjusted the national social benefit systems by extending the existing thresholds for family and childcare allowances and increasing benefit levels. By contrast, the reforms, introduced in the UK and Spain, have primarily targeted working families through means-tested tax exemptions rather than social benefits, and rely therefore on the more residual approach that characterises the liberal and Southern regime models.

The new reforms imply a change of policy discourse in Spain, Britain and Sweden towards a dual-earner society, as the reforms main purpose is to encourage women, in particular mothers, to enter paid work by increasing the financial incentives. However, the British tax credit reforms contain financial disincentives for low-skilled women living with a partner to seek employment, as families' may be caught in a benefit trap where their entitlements to financial support would decline while their income from paid work often do not equal this loss (Millar, 2004, p.69; Interview; UK expert on family issues). As result, the new reforms indirectly reinforce the traditional male breadwinner rather than support a dual-earner society. A similar criticism

applies to the German reforms, as the recent increases in the family allowance indirectly create financial incentives for mothers to stay at home rather than seeking employment (Interviews CDU, SPD). The new reforms indicate that the perceptions of policy actors, particularly in Germany and the UK, have not been transformed, as they continue to design policies, which reinforce the male breadwinner model. The political debates prior to the national reforms seem to support this.

The German debates show that the increase in family allowances was a contentious issue. The women's movement (Deutsche Frauenrat) and feminists in the parliament argued against the increase due to the potential danger of reinforcing the male breadwinner/female carer model, as the allowance would be a disincentive for women to seek employment (Interviews with CDU, SPD, Ministry of Women, Family and Youth). By contrast, both the CDU and the coalition government represented by the Department for Women, Family and Youth favoured an increase in the family allowances, as it would prevent unemployed to claim social assistance because of their children (Interview; SPD, CDU). However, the purpose of the reform differs among the political parties. The coalition government's overall aim was to link the child-rearing benefits to employment and make it a worker's right while the CDU saw it as a way to reduce childcare costs, as children could be cared for at home (Morgan & Zippel, 2003, p.59; Interview; CDU). Indeed, this states that not all key actors' perceptions regarding the male breadwinner model have been transformed. The national debates also imply that the reform was not designed for mobilising the female workforce, but was instead a way to reduce the number of people seeking unemployment benefits and even to some extent fortify traditional gender roles.

The new reforms were also controversial in Britain. National experts on family issues argued that the new reforms could prevent low-skilled women living with a partner from seeking employment. For the second partner of a couple to seek employment the financial incentives are almost non-existent or even discouraging due to benefit traps. As a response the New Labour government introduced a specific tax exemption of £2500 for dual-earner households, which improves only little the economic incentives for the second partner to seek employment (Interview; British expert on family issues). Despite the criticism and requests for other changes in the government's proposals, trade unions, women's movements, employers associations all welcomed the new tax credits, as they saw it as a valuable incentive to work (Women's Budget Group 2000, 2001; CBI, 2000; TUC16/11-2001). By contrast, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives were highly sceptical. The Liberal Democrats called for simplification, as they feared that the new system would be too complex and deter claimants from applying (Liberal Democrats, 19/11-2001). The Conservatives on the other hand opposed the way child-rearing benefits were linked to employment. They proposed instead a new Married Couple's Allowance for families with children, which to a large extent follows their view of childcare being a private matter as the proposal enables one parent to care for their children in the home (Conservatives, 31/5-2001). Although, the New Labour government was able to ignore the opposition due to the structure of the political system, it clearly demonstrates that not all key actors are convinced that a dual-earner model is the way forward.

A similar disagreement regarding the way to support families with children has been an ongoing issue in the Swedish debates, although, there is a consensus among all Swedish political parties, trade unions, employers associations and women's

movements to support families with children, as it enables all children to have similar living conditions and rights (Interview; Left Party; Wennemo, 2/4-2000). It is particularly the Christian Democrats and the right wing parties, who favour policies that enable parents, particularly mothers to care for their children in the home while the Social Democrats strongly supported by the trade unions and women's movements oppose such policies, as they reinforce traditional gender roles and exclude women from paid work (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2003, p 1). However, in the early 1970's the position of the Social Democrats was not as clear-cut, which indicates a change of attitudes within the party. It was mainly the trade unions (TCO and LO) that then opposed the home care allowance, as this enabled parents, in particular mothers, to stay home and care for their children. The home care allowance was strongly favoured by centre-right parties while the Social Democrats, despite their official negative stand, internally disagreed over this position (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2003, p. 6-8). The latest debate over the home care allowance is the Social Democrats withdrawing the home care allowance introduced by the centre-right government in 1994 when they came into power in 1995 (Leira, 2002, p. 114). Indeed, disputes still exist regarding the purpose of linking social transfers to paid work, as in particular centre-right political parties continue to favour home care allowances and thereby indirectly support traditional gender roles. The Social Democrats have therefore not managed to transform perceptions of all policy-makers.

In the case of Spain, the new social transfers introduced in the 2003 Personal Income Tax Reform have also been subject to intense debates, particularly with respect to whether the reform actually improved work incentives for low paid families. The reactions of the trade unions have been a total rejection of the reform, as the proposed tax allowances for children, the family and women conflict with progressive nature of taxations reforms, since these favour high-income families, as low paid are disregarded from making tax declarations and therefore do not benefit (eiroline, 2003b). The employers on the other hand supported the government's reform, as it is 'a step forward towards a tax model that favours growth and economic recovery in Spain' (eiroline, 2003b). Despite the lack of financial incentives within the tax reforms to help low-paid workers, national political parties have also proposed new family friendly policies, which raise child-rearing allowances and thereby enable parents, particularly women, to combine work and family life. The opposition party (The socialists) unveiled their intention of giving women a one-off payment of 3000 euros for their first child as part of their election manifesto while the current government has agreed to give women 1200 euros for giving birth to a third child (Casels, 1/8-2002). Indeed, the political initiatives represent a new momentum in Spanish politics, although it is debatable whether the new policies are merely aimed at rising fertility rates rather than supporting female employees (Moreno, forthcoming).

In sum, the national reforms regarding social transfers indicate a first order degree change as most of the new policy instruments enable parents, particularly mothers to combine work and family life. However, many of the reforms lack financial incentives for mothers to seek employment and particularly in Germany and Britain the reforms might have the opposite effect once implemented. As a result, the new reforms do not always support the overall goal of mobilising the female workforce. In addition, the Spanish and German reforms may be driven by other concerns e.g. rising fertility rates and reducing unemployment levels rather than supporting a dual-earner society. Therefore, it is only in Sweden and the UK a second order degree change can

be detected. Moreover, national governments have to a varying degree failed to transform the underlying ideals of the male breadwinner model, as many national policy-makers continue to support social transfers, which enable particularly women to stay home and care for their children. As a result a third order change and thereby a dual-earner discourse has not been legitimised. Nevertheless, national governments have been able to adopt policies, which aim at promoting female employment despite national opposition. The structures of the national political systems are important reasons for this. In Britain, the majoritarian system account for the lack of veto-points in the political debates while the large number of seats held by the Swedish Social Democrats enables them to ignore the centre-right requests (Talyor-Gooby, 2001, p. 148; Timonen, 2001, p 30). The Spanish tendency for consensus politics and the fact that the right-wing party PP government has the majority in Parliament may be the reason for their ability to introduce new reforms while the German government's ability to convince the CDU may be the reason for their success (Moreno, 2001, p. 108, Arriba, 2003, Bonker & Aust, forthcoming).

4.1.3 Childcare reforms

In recent years, access to formal childcare has been a high profile issue on the political agenda of Germany, Sweden and the UK while such services only have received limited political attention, since the introduction of universal pre-school education for children aged 3-6 years in 1990 in Spain. However, Spanish politicians are becoming more aware of the issue due to public pressure and the government has recently set a target of 250.000 new childcare places by 2004 (Vidal & Valls, 2002, p.25-26, EU 2002, p. 14). The different national initiatives in Sweden, Germany, Spain and the UK have been to develop the national childcare infrastructure by giving children a right to a free childcare place although the length and entitlement to these services differs across the three countries (see table 6). Access to a full-time childcare place for children aged 3- 6 years is a right in Sweden while children in Germany, Spain and the UK only have the right for a part-time place. The financial support to cover parents' childcare costs also differs in the four countries. A pre-school place is free in Spain while Sweden has the most generous means-tested thresholds and the German and British systems rely on residual support. The countries also rely on different approaches in their ways of providing childcare. The Spanish and British childcare market is based on a mixed economy while the local municipalities in Sweden and Germany provide childcare.

Despite the national differences, the new initiatives particularly in Germany, Spain and Britain signify a change of policy discourse towards a dual-earner society, as provision of childcare traditionally in contrast to Sweden has been deemed a private matter. In Germany, family policy including childcare was for the first time presented as a governmental declaration by the Chancellor himself during the 2002 election campaign, implying the importance of the issue and a change of attitudes within German politics. Similarly, in Britain the national childcare strategy introduced by New Labour was also the first of its kind, breaking with the traditional view of childcare not being a public issue (Lewis, 2003). This increasing emphasis on childcare across the four countries clearly indicates a change of policy discourse towards a dual-earner society. The new direction is also reflected within the national debates.

Developing childcare services for children under the age of three is becoming an increasing issue for both left and right wing parties in Spain. However, childcare continues to have a low profile on the political agenda compared to other policy areas. Pressure from trade unions, employers, political parties and social movements to create public policy for small infants (aged 0-3) is practically non-existent and can mainly be explained by Francoism and a tendency to focus on compulsory education and benefits for the unemployed (Vidal & Valls, 2002, p. 25). In contrast, employers associations, trade unions, women's movements and political parties in Germany, Sweden and the UK all acknowledge the need to expand the national childcare infrastructure to mobilise the female workforce.

In the German case, the CDU and SPD have revised their position from a reconsolidation of traditional gender roles in which rising levels of family allowance has been key to a more pro-working mother agenda that includes an expansion of childcare facilities. The employer association (BDA), the trade union (DGB) and the women's movement (Deutsche Frauenrat) have all supported this new direction proposed by the political parties. This consensus clearly indicates a change of ideals among the policy makers, as in the past the CDU has opposed any childcare reforms, resulting in two failed reforms regarding universal childcare rights and expansion of public care facilities (Bönker, Aust & Hellman, 2003). However, the tendency of the SPD to focus mainly on family benefits rather than childcare provision has along with local governments opposition to any attempts that curtail their authority and financial burden also prevented childcare expansions (Bönker & Aust, forthcoming). Despite their revised position regarding childcare expansion, the CDU's initial agenda for the 2002 election campaign, in contrast to the SPD, was to increase family allowance rather than expand childcare facilities, implying a support for the male breadwinner model. However, their main arguments were merely founded on administrative concerns rather than the idea of reinforcing traditional gender roles, as it is easier to implement family allowances at federal level than expand the childcare sector due to the political structure of the German welfare state (Interview; CDU). A change of ideals is seen among policy-makers and signifies a possible third order degree change. However, recent budget constraints in Germany may challenge the government's ability to follow up on the newly emerging consensus regarding childcare, as Germany has exceeded the three percent public deficit rule in the EU's Growth and Stability Pact (Interviews; CDU, SPD).

Budget constraints are also a key concern in Sweden with respect to the recent childcare reform. The trade union (Kommunal förbundet) and the **centre party** in particular have criticised the government for not providing enough funding for the local authorities to implement the reform (Sveriges Riksdag, 2000). Despite the criticism, employers associations, trade unions, women's movements and most political parties expect for the Christian democrats have supported the new initiatives, as it enables all children access to a childcare place (Gustafsson, 23/10-2000; Sveriges Riksdag, 2000; Wennemo, 2/4-2000). The Christian democrats' main concern was that families would spend less time together and the reform would therefore affect children's well-being in a negative way (Sveriges Riksdag, 2000). Although, the Christian democrats follow the ideals of the male breadwinner model, the recent reform signifies a change of attitude among the key actors. In the early 1970's, it was mainly trade unions and the Social democrats who argued for expanding the childcare sector while today almost all political parties support formal childcare (Hiilamo &

Kangas, 2003, p. 6-8; Interviews: Liberals, TCO, Centre right party, Social Democrats). As a result, the Social Democratic government with respect to childcare has managed to a large extent to transform the perceptions of most policy-makers and have been able to legitimise a dual-earner discourse.

A consensus regarding an expansion of childcare facilities is also present in the UK. In the early 1990's, the Conservative government began to design policies aimed at expanding the formal childcare sector and thereby breaking with their traditional view of childcare being a private matter (Land & Lewis, 1998). Trade Unions, employers associations, the women's movement and New Labour have also acknowledged the need for developing the childcare sector to improve the female employment rate (Interviews; TUC, EOC, government officials). However, disagreements exist between key actors regarding the way to raise the levels of affordable childcare. The Conservatives largely support a market-orientated approach, where only minimal state funded resources are used to expand the childcare market (Land & Lewis, 1998). Although New Labour officially favours a market approach in which childcare expansion is promoted through support to families and private providers rather than state run care facilities, internal disagreements exist within the party. Parts of the government have with the support of women's organisations, think tanks and trade unions criticised this market-orientated approach as being insufficient and advocated for a more state funded approach while the employers are indifferent to the used approach as long as it excludes them (Interviews; EOC, TUC, officials in government). A compromise was reached between the different parts of the New Labour party within the 2002 Comprehensive Spending Review, as additional funding was allocated to set up state provided nurseries in deprived areas while supporting the market approach via the new tax credits. However, the debate is far from resolved. As a government official expresses it:

"The new number of children's centres is where you could say: this is the end of the story, which might be the Treasury's view or you could say it is the middle of the story and what we now need to do is to roll this out." (Interview; government official).

The British debate indicates a recent change of key actors perceptions regarding the male breadwinner model. For the first time the concept regarding defamilisation of childcare via the public sector has reached the political agenda and policy actors have started to advocate for improving childcare facilities (Land, 2003, p. 11).

Overall the recent national reforms on childcare represents a change of discourse in terms of a second order change, as new policy instruments have been introduced and the political goal is to increase the employment rate of women. The political debates also signify a change of national actors' mindset, implying a radical change of discourse towards a dual-earner society. However, the recent reforms on parental leave and social transfers in particular imply that such a change is still a distant goal. Key actors continue to follow the logic of the male breadwinner model rather than a dual-earner discourse due to the failure of national governments to transform key actors' normative belief system. Nevertheless, a greater awareness of men's rights and the need for increasing the financial incentives for both men and women is becoming apparent in the national debates. In addition, most national governments have even been able to implement their reforms despite parliamentary opposition due to the

structure of the national political systems. However, governments have been unable to ignore opposition of employers, implying that employers are veto-points in the political debates

4.2 Second Agenda: Equal Opportunities Policies³

The political agenda on equal opportunities have received much less attention within the national political debates, although national governments have implemented the agreed EU policies on equal opportunities, which include a range of initiatives from legislation on equal treatment, positive action measures to gender mainstreaming. The British government have largely ignored the practical dimension of these reforms. As a British respondent expresses:

“We get told that they (the government) do not see sex discrimination as a major problem” (Interview EOC).

By contrast, the issue of gender equality, particular eliminating gender segregation and improving financial incentives for equal sharing of the gender role, have been part of the German and Swedish and to some extent the Spanish political agenda. The new initiatives instigated by the German government is even classified by a respondent as paradigm shift, as she expresses:

‘It was only in 1998, when the red-green coalition came into office that a major paradigm shift occurred in the sense that women’s employment and equality in the labour market should be achieved through explicit political actions [...] The paradigm shift is not only visible in terms of new aims and targets but also in the use of different instruments visible in the programme of women and profession (Interview; Ministry of Family, Older people, Women and Youth).

In the following, the more specific initiatives of civil rights for men and women, equal pay, gender mainstreaming including elimination of gender segregation are examined with respect to whether they represent a change of policy discourse.

4.2.1 Civil Rights and Equal Pay

The emphasis on fathers rights to parental leave and the greater awareness of the need to improve the financial incentives for families to employ a more equal sharing of the provider and caring role, imply that the national governments are beginning to address the issue of equal civil rights for men and women in their family policies. However, national governments have to a limited extent only addressed the most fundamental financial reason why families continue to follow traditional gender roles during periods of child-rearing. Eliminating wage differences between men and women by promoting equal pay have not been achieved in any of the member states despite EU’s 1976 directive on equal pay. However, national differences exist with respect to the gender pay gap. The largest pay gap is seen in Germany and Britain (21 percentages points respectively) while the wage differences are narrower in Sweden (18 percentages points) and Spain (15 percentages points). The incorporation of gender

³ This section draws heavily on the work of the German team (Frank Boenker, Andreas Aust & Hellmut Wollman), Swedish/Finnish Team (Virpi Timonen & Olli Kangas), the Spanish team (Ana Arriba & Louis Moreno) and the British Team (Trine P. Larsen, Peter Taylor-Gooby & Anne Daguerre) in carrying out interviews and preparing policy reviews.

issues in the Spanish collective agreements since 1994 and the Swedish government's emphasis on eliminating gender discrimination have improved the situation in these two countries while it is lack of political attention that is the main reason why the pay gap continues to be wide in Britain (Rubery, et. al, 2002, p. 129). With respect to Germany, a respondent reports that the main reasons are that:

'Female work is not honoured in the same way as predominately male work. [...] Germany has missed a development for ideological reasons. The family ideal of the 1950's and 1960s are still alive in the thinking of the people [...] and one of the reasons why there has not been sufficient progress. The basic problem is still to change the mentality of the people' (Interview; SPD).

National government's failure to transform the mentality of people is also evident in Britain, Sweden and Spain, as women continue to be paid less than men for the same job across Europe, implying that most policy-makers still to some extent believe that men's work is worth more than women's. Indeed, this demonstrates that national governments have been unable to legitimise the dual-earner discourse, which is a prerequisite for reaching the political goal of mobilising the female workforce.

4.2.2 Gender Mainstreaming and Elimination of Gender Segregation

Attempts to promote equal opportunities and eliminate gender segregation through gender mainstreaming have been more prevalent in national policies and debates. Although various projects are in place to secure gender mainstreaming and gender equality in all four countries, it is mainly in Sweden and Germany that these issues have also dominated the political agenda. The Swedish government is currently preparing a 121-programme, which aims at making the public sector a better employer in terms of improving the quality of women's work (Interview; the left party). In the German case, the red-green coalition government proposed the programme 'women and profession' in 1999, which among others included gender mainstreaming, elimination of gender segregation, reports on equal pay and an equality act aimed primarily at the private sector, as similar gender equality policies had already been implemented through legislation within the public sector during the 1990's (Bönker, Aust and Hellman, 2003 p. 40). Indeed, the new initiatives instigated by German government represent a shift in the existing policy discourse, as neither the CDU nor the FDP have proposed similar legislative measures to regulate gender equality for the private sector during their times in office (Bönker, Aust and Hellman, 2003).

The political debates and indeed the final results in Germany regarding the equality act indicate that not all key actors supported the new initiatives. Trade unions and the women's movement (Deutsche Frauenrat) strongly supported the government's proposal while employers associations such as the BDA in particular opposed any legislative attempts to regulate gender equality within the private sector and even threatened to reject the government's proposal for changing the parental leave system (Bönker, Aust and Hellman, 2003, p. XX). Some reluctance was also seen within the Office of the Chancellor with respect to the equality act, implying that perceptions of key actors have not been fully transformed. The results of the debate were that the Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, cancelled the legislative initiative for an equality act to achieve the employers support for the proposed changes of the parental leave system in July 2001 (Bönker, Aust and Hellman, 2003p. 40). Despite their view that voluntary methods proved insufficient to secure gender equality within the private

sector, the government replaced their proposal with a non-binding agreement between the government and employers associations in which exchange of best practice, positive action measures, gender mainstreaming and an improved framework for the infrastructure of childcare were included. The government promised not to legislate within the area, if the agreement was implemented successfully. Both trade unions and women's organisations criticised the new changes and continued to call for legislative measures, but their voices were ignored. However, the debate is far from resolved. The Green party continued to support a gender equality act for the private sector during the 2002 election campaign and government officials are planning to incorporate parts of the rejected equality act when implementing new the EU anti-discrimination directives (Interviews with CDU, SPD, BDA). Indeed, the debates demonstrate the failure of the red-green coalition government to transform the key actors perceptions regarding the importance of gender equality and thereby legitimise a dual-earner discourse. This seems also to be supported by the fact that a respondent reports:

“Gender equality is still a soft issue, which is likely to be neglected in the overall policy approach. [] There have been some important developments at the party conferences, which agreed on a progressive agenda and it has also been possible to strengthen the issue in the Agenda 2010” (Interview; SPD).

The political debates in Sweden are dominated by political parties, trade unions and women organisations all calling for new measures to eradicate gender pay gaps and to improve social transfers and the attitude at workplaces to foster equality for men and women. In addition, many key actors have also started to acknowledge a need to focus on enhancing the quality and not the quantity of women's employment (Interview; left wing party, social democrat, TCO). However, the social democratic government has not yet made a concrete proposal, but is preparing a proposal for addressing these issues in the 121 programme. This clearly shows a change of attitude among the key actors, as it is only recently that greater awareness to women's type of employment have reached the political agenda.

Spanish politicians and experts also acknowledge the need to focus on quality rather than quantity of female employment as well as the need to remove mental barriers regarding gender equality through prevention and education from very early on (Interview; PP). The target of having 50 per cent of women in stable labour market jobs by 2001 (which was reached) is a clear indication of this (Arriba, 2003, p. 24). The more recent initiatives proposed by the trade unions (CC.OO and UGT) also imply an increasing emphasis on promoting equal opportunities, as the CC.OO and UGT confederations made a joint declaration in which they emphasised the need for eliminating gender segregation (European Industrial Relations observatory, 2003). Indeed, this indicates a change of attitudes from the traditional male breadwinner model, as the key actors are concerned with improving general gender equality issues to enhance women's access to paid work. However, their concern is often not implemented in practice, as a respondent reports:

“Policy on equal opportunities has major legislative backing and is supported by public spokespersons, but is not binding and there is no budget which backs these stimulating principles. We even reach the perverse situation of applying for projects

funded by equal opportunities to then cover quite different needs' (Interview; Expert on gender equality).

By contrast to the Swedish, German and Spanish political debates, the issue of gender segregation and improving the quality of women's work only receives limited attention in the British debate, despite the set up of the Women and Equality Unit and the appointment of a Minister of Equality. A respondent reports:

"The UK the government does not see women's skills as a problem [...] They are not concerned about part-time versus full-time work for women..." (Interview; EOC).

However, this is not only of concern to female employees, as another British respondent reports that the overall aim of the British welfare to work strategy is to get people into work no matter the type and quality of the job (Interview; government official). It is therefore difficult to assess whether key actors perceptions are changing in Britain with respect to these elements of gender equality.

Overall the national policies and debates regarding equal opportunities policies indicate that to a varying degree key actors have started to address more general gender equality issues. However, it is evident that the national attempts to mobilise the female workforce have primarily focused on policies regarding reconciliation of work and family life rather than equal opportunities policies, which are essential to achieve a dual-earner society. Therefore, the low profile of the equal opportunities agenda indicates that national governments have not managed to legitimise the dual-earner discourse and therefore have failed to create incentives for a successful mobilisation of the female workforce.

5 Conclusion:

Mobilising the female workforce has been a political goal of national governments and the EU since the early 1990's. To reach this goal, a set of new policies has been implemented under the broad headings of "work-life balance policies" and "equal opportunities policies". Several approaches have been used depending on national traditions, resulting in a range of ways of tackling barriers to female employment, which often tend to follow regime types. Indeed, the reforms signify a move away from the male breadwinner model and may even represent a gradual convergence across Europe, as national services are improving in a way that may change the current perception of welfare regimes. Universal childcare services have been introduced in all four countries for certain age groups, new entitlements for fathers have been implemented and the concept of women as workers versus housewives is changing, as part of national attempts to mobilise the female workforce. However, the different employment patterns of women in Spain, Sweden, Germany and the UK imply that not all governments have been equally successful in removing barriers to female employment.

Many Spanish mothers still remain outside the labour market; British and German mothers continue to work mainly part-time; while Scandinavian women often work full-time during periods of child rearing. An important reason for this is the national variations in parental leave entitlements, social transfers and levels of care services in the four countries, which still are distinct despite recent work-life balance reforms in Spain, Germany, the UK and Sweden. Indeed, Sweden continues to have the most

generous system in terms of such services while the childcare services in Germany and the UK lack behind and the social transfers are poorer in Spain and the UK compared to Germany and Sweden. Similarly, equal opportunities policies such as social rights to parental leave, elimination of gender pay gaps and gender segregation as well as gender mainstreaming are the most advanced in Sweden despite recent reforms. Paternity leave is still a non-statutory right in Germany while new paternity rights have been implemented in Spain, the UK and most generously in Sweden. The UK has hardly addressed the problems of gender pay gaps and gender segregation, while such issues have to some degree dominated the Swedish, German and Spanish political agenda.

Despite recent attempts to advance social justice by promoting equal opportunities policies for men and women in the labour market and informal care sector such policies have received much less attention than work-life balance issues. Indeed, the analysis showed that it is mainly policies driven by economic concerns, which enable women rather than men to reconcile work and family life that predominates the political agenda. National governments' failure to transform key actors' perceptions from the traditional gender division to a dual-earner society proves important with respect to the low profile of equal opportunities policies. The analysis reflected that mental barriers had a crucial impact on the political process. It was mainly employers and to some extent right wing political parties who opposed reforms promoting equal rights for men and women, partly because of traditional attitudes regarding gender division and partly due to financial concerns. However, the structure of the national political systems enabled in particular British New Labour to ignore parliamentary opposition. The success of the German, Swedish and to some extent the Spanish government to adopt policies of equal opportunities depended on support from the opposition due to their national traditions and political systems. The opposition of employers were more difficult for national governments to ignore. Indeed, employers were to a varying degree veto-points in the political debates, particularly with respect to the introduction of new social rights for men and women, the proposed improvements of financial incentives for fathers to take a more active role in childcare and the gender equality policies. The political debate indicates therefore that a change of key actors' perception of gender roles proves crucial to implement new women-friendly policies, as powerful key actors can prevent new reforms from being adopted if they oppose them.

The political debates indicate that the current transformation towards a dual-earner society is only in its early stages despite national attempts to mobilise the female workforce. Mainly, because national governments have been unable to promote the normative arguments, which legitimise a dual-earner discourse through a transformation of key actors' perceptions from the male breadwinner model to a dual-earner society. As a result, national reforms continue to some degree to follow the logic of the male breadwinner model, as they lack incentives for families to employ a more equal gender division. Indeed, this shows a trade off between national governments' political goal of fully mobilising the female workforce and their national policies, partly because their work-life balance policies tend to support women as carers rather than workers, and partly because less attention is paid to men's rights and potential role in informal childcare. Therefore, national governments have only been able to promote the cognitive arguments, which justify their attempts to enhance women's participation in paid work and legitimise their used work-life

balance policies. They have failed to legitimise the dual-earner discourse by demonstrating its appropriateness in terms of transforming national values. For that reason, recent reforms do not represent a radical change of national policy discourse towards a dual-earner society. It is merely a discourse, which relegates women to live a role of secondary rather than equal worker, despite the fact that the importance of equal opportunities policies is becoming apparent in the political debates.

Table 1: Gender and Labour Market Participation for Women and Men - Participation of those aged 15-64 as % of relevant population, ranged after welfare regime type

	Total Employment				Part-time employment rate		Employment rate for Carers aged 20-49 of Children under 15		Part-time employment of mothers with children under 6
	Men		Women		Men	Women	Men	Women	Women
	1970	2002	1970	2002	2002	2002	1998	1998	2001
Nordic regime									
Denmark	92	80.2	58	72.6	10.3	23.0	93	77	6.1
Finland	83	69.2	61	66.1	7.5	14.8	83	58	..
Sweden	89	76.3	59	73.4	7.5	20.6
Conservative regime									
Germany	93	71.6	48	59.0	5.5	35.3	92	62	57.1
Austria	84	75.3	49	61.1	3.1	26.2	98	65	50.4
Belgium	84	68.1	40	51.1	6.0	32.4	87	55	45.0
France	87	68.1	49	54.3	5.2	24.1	88	57	36.7
Netherlands	83b	81.5	31b	64.7	14.7	58.8	97	66	69.4
Luxembourg	..	75.5	..	51.5	2.3	28.1			..
Southern regime									
Portugal	88a	75.7	54a	60.8	5.7	14.4	98	66	11
Spain	96	73.9	29	44.9	2.4	16.3	87	40	19.4
Italy	87	69.2	34	42.0	4.9	23.5	93	42	25
Greece	86	71.7	31	42.7	2.9	10.0	98	52	8
Liberal regime									
United Kingdom	94	78.9	51	66.3	8.9	40.1	87	69	66.4
Ireland	96	74.7	34	55.2	7.2	33.2	83	47	..
EU 15	89	72.9	45.	55.7	6.1	30.0	90	57	

Sources: OECD Labour Force Statistics 1970-1990, OECD Paris Eurostat (2002a) Tables A.20, A21; ECHP 1998 data, Calculated from OECD (2003)c, 2002, SS4.

Notes: a: 1980; b: 1975; c: 1998; d: 1997; e: 1999; EU Labour Force Survey.

Notes : carers are defined as individuals aged 20-49 looking after children under 15.

Table: 2 Female employment by occupation

	Legislators and managers	Professionals	Technicians	Clerks	Services and Sales workers
Belgium	8	24	10	24	16
Denmark	3	13	26	16	25
Germany	3.6	11.3	27.6	19.8	20
Greece	6.9	15.9	8.6	16.4	18.3
Spain	66.4	16.1	11.5	15.3	23.1
France	66	9.4	20.3	23.3	20.8
Ireland	11.3	21.1	6.1	23.7	24.1
Italy	1.8	15.6	17.6	20.3	21.0
Luxembourg	2.7	16	18.7	24	17.3
Netherlands	7.3	17.5	21.8	19.5	20
Austria	5	11.6	15.9	21.4	22
Portugal	4.7	9.1	7.3	13	19.8
Finland	4.8	16.4	18.7	13.9	25.4

Sweden	3	18.6	20.5	15.2	29.5
UK	9.8	11.8	13	24.9	26
EU 15	5.7	13	19	20.5	22

Source: European Labour Force Survey, 2002, table 18 selected categories.

Table 3: Overview of different types in Changes in national policy discourses and programmes

Change in policy discourse and policy programme	First order change: Renew the policy discourse and programme	Second order Change; Recast the policy discourse and programme	New third order change Revolutionary change of policy discourse and programme
Policy instruments:	Changed	Changed	Changed
Policy Objectives:	Same	Changed	Changed
Policy core:	Same	Same	Changed

Sources: Schmidt (2002) p. 223.

Table 4: Recent reforms in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Spain with respect parental leaves, flexible working and part-time work

	UK	Germany	Sweden	Spain
Policy Instruments:				
Maternity leave:	<u>Pay:</u> Rose from £75 to £100 per week <u>Paid leave:</u> Extended from 18 to 26 weeks <u>Unpaid leave:</u> Changed from 29 weeks that starts from actual week of birth to 26 weeks starting at end paid maternity leave	<u>No changes:</u> still 14 weeks paid leave.	<u>No changes:</u> Still min. 7 weeks paid.	Maternity pay: 100 per cent of salary for working mothers covered by the social security system <u>Paid leave:</u> extended from XX to 16 weeks
Paternity leave:	<u>Pay:</u> £100 <u>Paid leave:</u> Two weeks	No rights for paternity leave	<u>No changes:</u> still 10 days paid leave at birth of child plus two months. Same pay rate as parental leave.	<u>Paid leave:</u> two days plus a possible transfer of 4 weeks maternity leave to the father
Parental Leave:	<u>Unpaid leave:</u> a right to 13 weeks for both parents	<u>Parental pay:</u> income ceiling increased to XX. Specific benefit to parents taking less than 1 years leave <u>Paid leave:</u> changed to an individual right. Both parents can take up to three years leaveS. Entitlement to work during leave: extended from 19 to 30 hours per week.	<u>Pay:</u> decreased from 90 % to 80 % of income; Income ceiling: 24.000 SEK, min. from £6.1 to £13.2 per day <u>Paid leave:</u> prolonged from 12 to 13 months in which 60 days are reserved for each parent and rest (9 months) can be divided among parents as they wish. Entitlement to work part-time during parental leave	<u>Unpaid leave:</u> up to three years, but if working only one parent is entitled to this benefit.
Emergency leave:	<u>Unpaid leave:</u> for a reasonable amount of time to care for sick child or older dependant	<u>Paid leave</u> for 10 days a year.	<u>Emergency pay:</u> decreased from 90 to 80% of income. <u>Paid leave:</u> changed from 90 to 120 days p.a. for both fathers and mothers	Unpaid leave
Flexible working:	A right to request flexible working to parents with children under six	A right to part-time work	No changes: Still	A request to reduce working-time if caring for a child under six.

Sources: Treasury/DTI (2003), p. 26-27; Salido, 2002, p. 23; International reform monitor, 1999, Bönker & Aust, forthcoming; Bradshaw & Finch, 2002; Timonen, 2003, p. 27.

Table 5: Recent reforms regarding social transfers in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Spain

	UK	Germany	Sweden	Spain
Benefits		Rising child benefit from €12 to €54		<u>An €100 allowance</u> to all working mothers <u>An allowance of €1.200</u> for women giving birth to a third child
Tax Credits	<u>Working tax credit:</u> Thresholds: <u>Child tax credit:</u> available to families with children: thresholds: amount			<u>Tax exemptions</u> for people caring for dependant and young children under 3. <u>Minimum family income</u> based on tax reductions
Childcare support	Childcare tax credit: paid to working parents: thresholds:	Tax deductions for childcare expenses	Thresholds for the means-tested subsidized childcare increased from 700 to 1140 SEK	Means- tested childcare allowance

Sources: Treasury/DTI (2003), Salido, 2002,; International reform monitor, 1999, Bönker & Aust, forthcoming; Bradshaw & Finch, 2002; Timonen, 2003, p. 27.

Table 6: Recent Childcare reforms in the UK, Germany, Sweden, Spain and EU

	UK	Germany	Sweden	Spain	EU
Policy Instruments					
Targets	<u>2006:</u> 1.25 million childcare places <u>2004:</u> Free part-time nursery place for all 3 and 4 year olds	<u>2010:</u> 20 per cent more childcare places for children under 3	7 per cent rise in female employment rate	<u>2004:</u> 240.000 new childcare places	<u>2010:</u> 90 per cent of all children aged 3 to mandatory school age and 30 percent of children under 3 in childcare
Childcare programme	<u>National Childcare Care Strategy:</u> aimed at improving childcare services <u>Sure Start programmes:</u> aimed at childcare in deprived areas <u>Free nursery place</u> for all 3 and 4 year	<u>Education and care programme;</u> aimed at improving childcare services <u>Free part-time preschool</u> education for all 3-6 year olds	<u>Free preschool education</u> for all four and five year olds	<u>Free preschool education</u> for all 3-6 year olds. <u>Quality of Teaching law;</u> aimed at harmonising national childcare services	
Policy goal:	Mobilise female workforce	Mobilise female workforce	Mobilise female workforce	Mobilise female workforce	Mobilise female workforce

Sources: Treasury/DTI 2003; Bönker, Aust & Hellman, 2003; European Commission (2002), p.14; Vidal & Valls, 2002, p.25-26; International reform Monitor, 2001.

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